



NEWS RELEASE

PRESS OFFICE

Release Date: August 25, 1998

Contact: Patricia Young (202) 205-6740

Release Number: 98-73

Press Release Internet Address: www.sba.gov/news/

SBA Answer Desk Logs One Million Calls

“Real Answers” to Small Business Questions

WASHINGTON – Since February 1996, more than one million callers have received small business advice from the “real live customer service reps” who answer the U.S. Small Business Administration’s (SBA) nationwide toll-free hotline.

Calls to the SBA Answer Desk (**1-800-U-ASK-SBA**) come from people across the country who are seeking help in starting or expanding their own businesses.

The Answer Desk, based in the SBA’s District Office in Charlotte, N.C., is staffed by 10 knowledgeable SBA advisors. They offer advice and referrals on questions ranging from “How do I get money to start my own company?” to “How do you measure the size of a small business?”

SBA Administrator Aida Alvarez says an efficient and user-friendly Answer Desk is important because it is frequently SBA’s first point of contact with small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs.

“The improvement in customer service at the Answer Desk is an important achievement for SBA,” Administrator Alvarez said. **“Even though we’re using technology in lots of innovative ways, it can be comforting to talk to a ‘real live person’ who can get answers for you.”**

Here are the ways SBA’s Answer Desk has improved the delivery of small business information in the past year:

- Replaced an automated response system with live small business specialists
- Improved response time with 98 percent of all calls answered on the first ring;
- Integrated the SBA Answer Desk with SBA’s Internet Web site (**www.sba.gov**).
- Made assistance available in English and Spanish.

- more -

SBA has also added a direct mail center that distributes over 20,000 free publications nationally per month. Publications include *How to Start a Business*, *How to Finance your Business*, *Programs and Services Guides* and *Are You Y2K OK?*

“Not all Answer Desk questions are easy ones,” said Gary Cook, director of SBA’s Charlotte District Office. “The frequently asked questions such as ‘How do I start a business?’ or ‘How do I get a loan?’ are answered immediately. But some issues require research, such as raising venture capital or dealing with environmental regulations.”

SBA Answer Desk’s 10 Most Frequently Asked Questions:

1. How do I get a small business loan?
2. How do I get a small business grant? (*note: SBA has no grant programs*)
3. How do I get started in business?
4. How do I get a business license?
5. How do I get a tax identification number?
6. How do I write a business plan?
7. What type of collateral do I need for a loan?
8. Is there any small business assistance in my area?
9. What classifies a business as ‘small’?
10. How can I get my business certified as woman or minority-owned?

-0-

The U.S. Small Business Administration, established in 1953, provides financial, technical and management assistance to help Americans start, run, and grow their businesses. With a portfolio of business loans, loan guarantees and disaster loans worth more than \$45 billion, the SBA is the nation's largest single financial backer of small businesses. Last year, the SBA offered management and technical assistance to more than one million small business owners. The SBA also plays a major role in the government's disaster relief efforts by making low-interest recovery loans to both homeowners and businesses.

America's 23 million small businesses employ more than 50 percent of the private workforce, generate more than half of the nation's gross domestic product, and are the principal source of new jobs in the U.S. economy.

###